

2013 FEDERAL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER

Category 8 - Outstanding Community Service Employee

Mary F. Godina

Social Security Administration

FACTOR I - JOB COMPETENCE

Although the supporting cast is not normally in the foreground, the work they perform is usually crucial to the success of the project. The expertise Mary Godina provides as a member of the Chicago Region's Systems Operation Support Team is invaluable to the Social Security Administration (SSA), as we continue our mission to deliver Social Security services that meet the changing needs of the public.

Mary is an expert in the computer software used by employees in SSA's field offices to process claims for Social Security Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance benefits. She has worked with these systems for more than 30 years and has a wealth of institutional knowledge. As the most experienced member of her team she provides leadership and guidance to her teammates as she willingly shares information and tips she has learned over the years.

Mary has excellent analytical skills. She is very thorough and discovers many systems problems and anomalies that others do not notice. She not only discovers these issues, but also works diligently with teammates and colleagues in other regions and SSA's headquarters to address them and find resolutions. Mary's investigations and actions have helped ensure accurate payments were made to beneficiaries, minimized delays in processing claims and ensured beneficiaries received accurate notices from SSA.

Mary demonstrates great concern regarding thorough and accurate guidance and instruction being provided to SSA's frontline employees. In past years Mary has been instrumental in having many agency-wide operating manuals and instructions issued, corrected or updated. In recent months alone she has been responsible for 5 issuances or corrections. Proper guidance and instruction enables employees to use processing systems correctly in order to continue to provide the quality services SSA is known for.

The Chicago Region recognizes and appreciates Mary's knowledge and systems expertise but she also known and respected by colleagues in other regions and throughout the agency. Mary actively participates in 5 national workgroups where she routinely shares her knowledge and expertise and makes sound recommendations on agency-wide projects and initiatives designed to facilitate the meeting of agency goals. One such workgroup focuses on SSA's electronic services. SSA continues to expand the online services available via the "My Social Security Account." Mary is part of a great support team that helps monitor, report, and find resolutions for problems with SSA's systems side of these services. That crucial backend support helps the Social Security Administration continue to develop and provide the services our customers need and desire.

Mary has sustained superior performance of her assigned duties over the last five years. She is dedicated and committed to her work and the work of SSA. She is a true model of public service.

FACTOR II – COMMUNITY SERVICE

In Illinois, more than 670, 000 women have been the victim of sexual assault. Often victims feel too embarrassed to talk about the attack, even to the people closest to them. Frequently they have feelings of guilt, shame, anger and isolation. As a Medical Advocate for Guardian Angel's Sexual Assault Service Center (SASC) since 1998, Mary Godina has dedicated herself to providing compassionate service to others at critical and the most vulnerable moments in their lives.

For the past 15 years, Mary has selflessly donated her time to Guardian Angel Community Services because of her strong desire to help and serve her community. She has donated thousands of on-call hours over the years, normally averaging 25-50 hours per month. These calls regularly come during the

late night and early morning hours of the day. On many occasions after returning home from a call, Mary has been paged again within 20-30 minutes. During time of dire need, Mary has accepted requests to be on call after even after working a 9-hour tour and commuting from downtown Chicago for over an hour. She has left birthday parties, altered family plans and volunteered on vacation days, all to provide help to those in need.

When Mary receives a page, it is usually from a nurse in a hospital emergency room. She gathers necessary information about the victim including gender, age and primary language so she can bring the appropriate clothing, supplies and printed material to assist the client. Once at the hospital, Mary immediately begins to offer comfort and support, assuring the clients she is there for whatever they may need. That need may be for Mary to hold their hand, wipe their tears, cover them with a warm blanket, help them get calm, or call a friend. Mary has spent more than 300 hours providing crisis counseling in emergency rooms throughout Will and Grundy County, to over 100 sexual assault victims and their families. Her oldest client was 60; her youngest was 5.

Most of the sexual assault victims Mary helps are not admitted to the hospital. Therefore, the crisis counseling she provides takes place in emergency rooms, which can feel cold, impersonal and unprotected. Mary offers much needed support during this difficult time as she advocates on behalf of the client. She comforts and encourages them as they endure repeatedly describing what happened to them to various medical and law enforcement personnel. When requested, which is most of the time, Mary is in the room while the rape kit samples are collected. Before the procedure begins, she explains what will happen, the client's rights and the legal aspects of the procedure. She pays close attention the activities of the medical personnel to be sure they do not break the chain of evidence or do anything that could invalidate the kit results and hinder prosecution of the perpetrator. Even while paying close attention to the doctors and nurses, Mary holds the patient's hand and provides answers to questions throughout the procedure. Over the years, she has learned to remove her rings, but certainly will not let go of anyone's hand. After all necessary medical procedures are completed, Mary meets physical needs by providing soap, shampoo and other personal items for clients who want to shower. She also brings clothing for clients because in most cases, their clothing is collected as evidence and in some cases, removed during the assault. Before the person leaves the hospital, Mary provides after-care where she advises the client of the need for follow-up medical care, counseling and testing and ensures they have a safe place to go. She provides information and instructions for, free and confidential HIV testing, court advocacy services and free counseling available through Guardian Angel Community Services. She also provides brochures and other material for the clients and their families on what to expect after what they have experienced. Mary's ability to speak fluent Spanish increases the importance and value of the advocacy, service and support she provides. She is one of a few bi-lingual volunteers, which the community needs greatly.

Mary completes a detailed report for each call she responds to before she leaves the hospital. It takes her at least 30 minutes to complete each report. These reports are essential in compiling statistical data and for providing the appropriate follow-up care and counseling. These reports are also crucial in helping to determine the amount of funding the Guardian Angel SASC receives from the State of Illinois in order to carry out its mission of helping change and save lives throughout the community.

Mary's community service work with Guardian Angel has been especially commendable this past year since she has been dealing with critical moments in her life. After recovering from a health scare of her own, Mary and her family were faced with the sudden, undetermined illness of her brother and the multiple illnesses and hospitalizations of her mother. Mary has been by her brother's side during his hospitalizations, extensive testing, and doctor's visits. Even though she was very busy advocating for her brother and caring for her aging parent, this did not keep Mary from continuing her advocacy and service on behalf of those thrust into crisis by sexual assault. Throughout this past year, while still performing her job duties at an outstanding level and handling her personal family challenges, Mary continued to provide emergency room crisis counseling for the SASC. While she has had to decrease her hours, she continues to donate of minimum of 12 hours per month and attends monthly meetings where she receives training on changes in laws and procedures and provides support to other volunteers in dealing with difficult and often heartbreaking cases.

Guardian Angel volunteers, including Mary Godina, won The Herald News' Hometown Heroes award and contributed to Guardian Angel Community Services receiving the "2011 Agency of the Year: Outstanding Agency in Human Services Award" from the Community Service Council of Will County. Mary was previously nominated by Guardian Angel for Volunteer of the Year. What may stand out the most though, is when the mother of an 8 year old client sees her in the grocery store and says, "I just want to thank you again."

The Social Security Administration's vision is to provide the highest standard of considerate and thoughtful service for generations to come. As a federal employee, Mary has dedicated her professional and community service work to this vision, providing caring and compassionate service as she advocates for the public we serve and those in crisis. It is my pleasure to nominate Mary for this award.

When asked why she does what she does, her answer was, "Hope. I want people to have hope. I want them to believe they can and will get past this. I want them to believe there is hope."